



The three Presidents of the Vajirañāṇa National Library.
H. R. H. Prince Chao Fa Mahavajiravudh (now H. M. King Rāma VI):
1905-1910.
H. R. H. Prince Sammot Amarabandhu: 1910-15.
H. R. H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab: since 1915.

THE
VAJIRANĀNA
NATIONAL LIBRARY
OF
SIAM

BY G. CÆDÈS
Chief Librarian

WITH 30 ILLUSTRATIONS

Published by Authority of the Council
of the National Library

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Library

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Introductory Note.

The steadily increasing number of visitors to the Vajira-ñāna National Library, both tourists whose programme includes a visit to this institution, as well as residents wishing to make use of its treasures, renders the publication of a general description of the Library desirable and even necessary. The excellent notices published by His Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, President of the Council of the Library, on the occasion of the opening of the new building (January 1917) and more recently in the "Dusit Samit" (1st January 1922), are written in Siamese, a fact which prevents the majority of Europeans, and Americans, and more particularly tourists, from making use of them. The publication of the present notice seems, therefore, to meet a general need.

The present little volume is not intended to be a guide-book, in which visitors will find a minute description of the Library, room by room. This institution is still in its youth, that is to say, is passing through a period of constant growth, which necessitates frequent modifications in the arrangement of the rooms, while extensions are also contemplated in the near future. Consequently a book describing the present arrangement of exhibits would in all likelihood have to be modified next year.

In order to obviate this difficulty, the present notice proposes to describe the various departments and sections of the Library, without regard to their situation in the present building, and it is hoped that the descriptions given will remain correct for a considerable time to come, and that visitors will be able to make use of this book even after the changes contemplated have been realized.

The author wishes to express his thanks to H. R. H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, President of the Council of the National Library, for reading these pages, few of which do not owe something to his advice;— and to Mr. R. S. le May for suggestions regarding English style and idiom.

Bangkok, August 1924.



1908

HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

The Vajirañāṇa National Library, founded by Royal Decree on the 12th October 1905, is the result of an amalgamation of three different libraries which were in existence at that time, viz. :

The Mandira Dhamma Library,

The Vajirañāṇa Library,

The Buddhasāsanasaṅgaha Library.

Vajirañāṇa Library.

The name Vajirañāṇa was the religious name borne by His Majesty King Mongkut (Rāma IV), when still in the priesthood, before His accession to the Throne. That name was chosen by King Mongkut's children as the style of the Library which they decided to establish, in 1882, in memory of their father.

It will not be without interest to reproduce here the first part of a short pamphlet published in 1905, which gives a somewhat detailed account of the history of the Vajirañāṇa Library.

“During the reign of King Mongkut His Majesty ordered a block of brick houses to be built for private purposes, on a piece of land belonging to the Privy Purse Department, in front of the Prayuravongs Monastery on the west side of the river in Bangkok. These buildings were not finished at the time of His Majesty's demise in 1868, and the whole of that property, along with several others, was included in the estate left by the King to His August Son and Successor, His Majesty King Chulalongkorn, by whom the unfinished buildings were brought to completion, when they were leased to private people by the Privy Purse Department.

"In the seventh or eighth year of His Reign, His Majesty King Chulalongkorn discovered, among some old documents, a note left by His Royal father stating that the property in question should be owned jointly by His different children, each one having a share in the income to be derived therefrom. His Majesty King Chulalongkorn reverently carried out this paternal bequest and caused separate title-deeds of the divisions of that property to be made out in the names of the Members of the Royal Family concerned. At the same time He gave up his own share, as one of the Royal inheritors, to His son, the then Crown Prince, H. R. H. Prince Vajiruphis. On the death of H. R. H. Prince Vajiruphis, his title in the property was, by Royal Command, transferred to His Majesty the present King, who then became Heir to the Throne.

"In the year 1881, the Royal children of His Majesty King Mongkut who had shares in this property, (amongst whom were Their Royal Highnesses Prince Bhanurangsi, and the late Princes Bijit and Devawongse), eager to create a useful institution in loving memory of their Royal father, as well as to pay a mark of gratitude and respect to His Majesty King Chulalongkorn, unanimously agreed to give up their respective incomes from the said property for the purpose of creating a Library in Bangkok. This praiseworthy determination, on being brought before King Chulalongkorn, was heartily approved by His Majesty, who most willingly promised to give the useful scheme every possible support.

"In the first instance, His Majesty was graciously pleased to allot a room on the ground floor of the Maha Chakkri Palace to be used as the proposed Library, and gave it the name of "Vajirañāṇa Library," after the appellation by which His Royal father King Mongkut was known, when His Majesty was in the priesthood, previous to His accession to the Throne, thus perpetuating at the same time the memory of that studious period of His Majesty's life. The first President of the institution was His Royal Highness Prince Bhanurangsi, and a large number of members were elected. An elective Committee of management was formed, and its members as well as the President of the Library were elected every year.

"In the year 1889, H. R. H. the Crown Prince Vajiruphis became President for that year, but His Majesty King Chulalongkorn acted in that capacity in place of His son, who was then a minor. At this period the usefulness of the Library had much increased, and the accommodation originally provided on the ground floor of the Maha Chakkri palace proved inadequate. By Royal permission the Library was removed to new quarters in the building which is now used as offices by the Royal Body-guard of Gentlemen at Arms. The scope of the institution continued to develop, and the new premises did not prove sufficient for long. Therefore, when the Royal Museum was removed to its present situation in the Wangna Palace precincts, the Vajirañāṇa Library was at the same time transferred to the old Museum building."

In his notice on the National Library published in "Twentieth Century Impressions of Siam" (page 248), Dr. Frankfurter says:

"This Library was not a State Institution, although from its very beginning generous assistance was lent to it by the donation of books and by the provision of furniture, &c. In connection with it a magazine was issued, the Vajirañāṇa Magazine, and in its columns information may be found regarding the early history, literature and customs of Siam. The Library was originally conceived as a general one; and as the Libraries of King Mongkut and His brother Phra Pin Klao were incorporated with it, the collection of books of foreign literature, especially English, was for that time a valuable one. With regard to Siamese literature, an endeavour was made to collect all books published in Siam, and copies were added of some of the valuable and unique manuscripts contained in the Royal Scribes Department. Members were admitted by vote of the committee. They had to pay an annual subscription of twenty ticals, and the friendly intercourse thus established on neutral ground was one of the great benefits derived from that institution."

Mandira Dhamma Library.

The Mandira Dhamma Library was a religious one, created in 1783 in the precincts of Wat Phra Keo, which was then in course of construction. Its purpose was to keep the Royal collections of the Tripiṭaka or Buddhist Scriptures.

After the religious council held in 1788 (v. infra) had resulted in the completion of a standard edition of the scriptures, the collection of manuscripts containing this edition was removed to the new Mandira Dhamma Library; but the very day on which the installation of the collection took place, an outbreak of fire, caused by a rocket, completely destroyed the building. Fortunately, it was possible to rescue the manuscripts from the flames in good time. Two new buildings were therefore erected, and these served to house the Royal Editions of the scriptures until the foundation of the National Library, when, with the exception of two, they were all added to the collections of the latter institution.

Buddhasāsanasaṅgaha Library.

The Buddhasāsanasaṅgaha Library was founded by King Chulalongkorn on the 11th. July 1900 in the precincts of Wat Benchama with the object of bringing together the various collections of the Buddhist scriptures in different languages, as well as books on Buddhism, and Oriental Reviews; and in addition, objects relating to Buddhism and Buddhist scriptures, such as bookcases, cloths used for wrapping manuscripts, pulpits, etc.

ORGANIZATION OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

Originally, the administration of the National Library was vested in a Council consisting of a President and four members. They were appointed by the King and held office for a term of three years, one member retiring each year. But it has been found more advisable that the President and members should remain permanently appointed as a Council, in order that some continuity of policy and effort may be assured. Further, the Chief Librarian and the Librarians are also appointed by the King, while the necessary number of clerks and minor officials are appointed by the Council.

The first Council consisted of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince (now His Majesty the King) as President; H. R. H. Prince Sammot Amarabandhu, who became President on His Majesty's accession to the Throne in 1910, but died five years later; H. R. H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, who is the third and the present President; H. E. Phya Prajakich Korachak (deceased); and H. E. Phya Boran Buranuraks (now Phya Boran Rajadhanindr, Viceroy of the Ayudhya Circle).

Since the Royal Proclamation of the 17th January 1924, creating an Archaeological Service under the direction of the Council of the Library, this Council consists (1924) of:

H. R. H. Prince Damrong Rajanubhab,	President.
H. R. H. Prince Narisara Nuvattivongs	} Members.
H. H. Prince Bidyālaṅkarāṇa	
H. S. H. Prince Piya Bhaktinath	
H. E. Chao Phya Dharmasakti Montri	
H. E. Phya Boran Rajadhanindr	

The National Library is divided, in the customary way, into two main departments, viz. *Manuscripts* and *Printed Books*, but an unusual fact is that manuscripts are at present far more numerous than printed books. The reason for this, as given by Dr. Frankfurter, is as follows :

"It was quite apparent that the scope of the library had to be a restricted one, however desirable it might have been to form a general library in which all scientific branches were included. After mature consideration the council decided, owing to the limited means at their disposal, to give their whole attention to the acquisition of Thai Literature, rightly thinking that printed books in foreign languages could be acquired at a future date, whilst any delay in the acquisition of Thai manuscripts might prove fatal...

"The task, which was thus incumbent on the council, was admittedly an arduous one, and no one could foresee its scope. Practically nothing was known about Thai Literature. Printing was introduced into Siam in 1836, but only came into general use in the reign of King Mongkut (1851-1868). In the troublous times which followed the destruction of Ayudhya many valuable manuscripts had been lost; those which were found had been, with few exceptions, carelessly copied; old and original manuscripts did not appear to be available; and every scribe, it seems, thought he was justified in altering and correcting manuscripts. In many cases simply the official title of the author has been used and his name remains unknown, whilst the dating of manuscripts leaves much to be desired. Generally speaking, it is not the author but rather the work, as such, which is honoured...

"However, as soon as it was shown that the Council were in real earnest, donations poured in, and are still pouring in from all sides, both from priest, and layman. Manuscripts which could be acquired at a small cost, were placed in the library, which has thus been able to collect and preserve for future generations a large number of valuable manuscripts which would otherwise have passed into oblivion." (1)

(1) Dr. Frankfurter, loc. cit.

II



Foreign Books Department
Public Reading Room.

Manuscripts are distributed into five sections :

Pāli Manuscripts,
Religious Works,
Literary Works,
Historical Works (including Records),
Scientific Treatises (such as books on Astrology,
Medicine etc.).

The Department of Printed Books comprises two sections :

Siamese,
Foreign (including European, Chinese, Sanskrit
etc.)

Maps of every description are incorporated in the section of Foreign Books. A special section of pictorial records comprises drawings, pictures and photographs of eminent persons or of objects of interest.

The preparation of the catalogue is an arduous task, the more so because the Siamese officials of the National Library, however good scholars they may be, are not trained librarians. It will require some years before a detailed catalogue can be printed and issued. Up to the present the National Library has only published a list of its Pāli manuscripts and Sanskrit books. But each librarian has already prepared compendious lists of all the volumes in his section, and the section of Foreign printed books possesses two catalogues on cards; the one arranged by subjects, and the other by authors' names.

The public has free access to the National Library and can make use of several reading-rooms, one of which is specially reserved for the readers of daily or monthly newspapers and magazines, both Siamese and Foreign.

As a general rule, books cannot be borrowed and taken away. But well-known residents, who are in need of books for a special study, are allowed to do so for a short period of time, provided the book in question is not a rare one, and can be easily replaced in case of loss or damage.

Besides the activities of the National Library which are more or less common to every library, the printing and publication of books require special mention.

These publications may be divided into three categories:

1. Books published by the Library at its own expense. These consist chiefly of European books, and include, inter alia: "Seventeenth Century Documents" (*The relations between Siam and foreign countries in the seventeenth century*), "Dutch Papers" (*Extracts from the Daily Journal kept in Batavia Castle and more especially concerning Siam in 1624-1642*), "The Crawford Papers" (*A collection of official Records relating to the mission of John Crawford, sent to Siam by the Government of India in the year 1821*), and "The Burney Papers" (*Papers relating to his mission to Siam from 1825-1826*).

2. Books published by local printers, by permission of the Council, from old books or manuscripts kept in the National Library. The Library is entitled to receive 20% of the issue.

3. Books printed for distribution on the occasion of cremations and other religious ceremonies, at the request of pious or charitable persons and at their own expense. These form at present the majority of the Library's publications. Since 1904 it has been the custom for the near relatives of a deceased person, following the example of H. M. King Chulalongkorn, to distribute books as "Souvenirs" to all friends who take part in, or are present at, the ceremonies of the cremation. Originally, the books printed on such occasions were almost exclusively of a religious character. But for some time past historical and literary works having met with considerable success, the custom has been established for a private person, wishing to produce a book with a view to its distribution at a cremation, or at some other religious ceremony, to apply to the Council of the National Library who choose something suitable from among the manuscripts available, and supervise its publication at the expense of the private person making the request. In acknowledgment of the service rendered, it is usual to give to the Library 200

copies, of which 100 are put on sale for the benefit of that institution, while the balance are partly distributed among its benefactors, and partly sent to the following foreign learned societies, with which the Library entertains exchange relations:

AMERICA (UNITED STATES OF)

The Smithsonian Institution, Washington.
The Library of Congress, Washington.
The American Oriental Society, Newhaven.
The University of Illinois, Urbana.
The Connecticut State Library, Hartford.

PHILIPPINE ISLANDS.

The Bureau of Science, Manila.

AUSTRIA.

Anthropos, St. Gabriel-Mödling, near Vienne.

CHINA.

The North China Branch of the R. A. S., Shanghai.

DENMARK.

The Royal Library, Copenhagen.

FRANCE.

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
Ecole Nationale des Langues Orientales, Paris.
Musée Guimet, Paris.
Société Asiatique, Paris.
Association française des Amis de l'Orient, Paris.

INDOCHINE FRANÇAISE.

Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, Hanoi.
Société des Etudes indochinoises, Saigon.

GERMANY.

Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin.
Deutsche morgenländische Gesellschaft, Halle.
Seminar für orientalische Sprachen, Berlin.

GREAT BRITAIN.

The British Museum, London.
The India Office, London.
The School of Oriental Studies, London.
The Royal Asiatic Society, London.
The Royal Anthropological Institute, London.
The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

INDIA.

The Archaeological Survey of India, Simla.
The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta.
The Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Bombay.

CEYLON.

The Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Colombo.

STRAITS SETTLEMENTS.

The Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Singapore.

BURMA.

The Archaeological Survey of Burma, Mandalay.
The Burma Research Society, Rangoon.

ITALY.

Scuola orientale della Reale Università, Rome.

JAPAN.

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, Tokyo.

SWEDEN.

Kungl. Universitetets Bibliotek, Uppsala.

NETHERLANDS.

Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-
Indie, The Hague.

NETHERLANDS INDIES.

Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen, Batavia.

The above societies send their publications to the Library in return, so that the task of publishing books, however arduous it may be, is a source of substantial benefit, and contributes in spreading the knowledge of Siamese literature and history.

Such are the general activities of the National Library.

The massive building, in which the Library is now housed, was begun during the reign of H. M. King Chulalongkorn, and was originally intended as a permanent building to be used on the occasion of Royal Cremations; but the King died before its completion. When the former library inside the precincts of the Royal Palace became inconveniently small, H. M. the present King ordered the unfinished building to be repaired and completed and handed over to the Library Authorities, and the Library was officially opened by H. M. King Rāma VI at its new premises on the 6th. January 1917. It is a long edifice, designed by H. R. H. Prince Narisara Nuvattivongs in the style of the old Khmer galleries, comprising a succession of rooms of various sizes, with a broad corridor verandah running the whole length inside.

The five rooms to the right of the entrance contain the section of Foreign printed books (i.e. European, Sanskrit, Chinese, etc.) kept in bookcases (some of which have been presented by members of the Royal family), the reading-rooms, and the offices of the Chief Librarian.

The rooms to the left contain the Pāli and Siamese books and manuscripts, the Council-room, the offices of the Secretary to the Council and of the Librarians in charge of the various sections of the

Pāli and Siamese departments. The many Siamese book-cases now on view, in which the manuscripts are kept, and which will be described below, have been acquired gradually in the following manner.

During the Presidency of His Majesty the present King, the need for book-cases was strongly felt, but as sufficient funds were not available, it was decided to apply to the Abbots of a number of temples for gifts of some of the cupboards lying useless in their charge, and to keep them in the Library as national property. When the Abbots saw how beautiful their cupboards looked, when carefully cleaned and properly kept, they became more and more willing to part with them for the benefit of the Library, which now possesses over three hundred of these book-cases forming a most interesting and representative collection of this branch of Siamese art.

The corridor verandah has been utilised as a gallery to contain a suitable exhibition of Siamese script, showing the various forms of material on which it is written, and in which it is preserved. Specimens of illuminated manuscripts and of old manuscripts on palm-leaves or on paper, as well as samples of the cloths used for wrapping manuscripts, are exhibited in show-cases on the one side. The other side is occupied by ancient inscriptions on stone.

After these preliminary and necessary remarks regarding the organization and present state of the National Library, we shall now proceed to give a description of the various kinds of books which are kept in the different sections, and of the objects which form, as already stated, a permanent exhibition of Siamese script.

PĀLI AND SIAMESE MANUSCRIPTS ON PALM-LEAVES

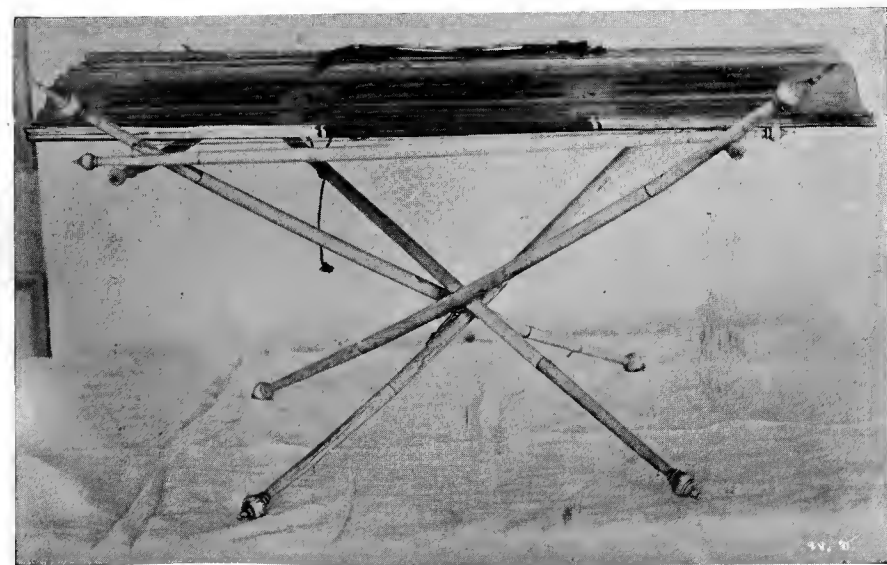
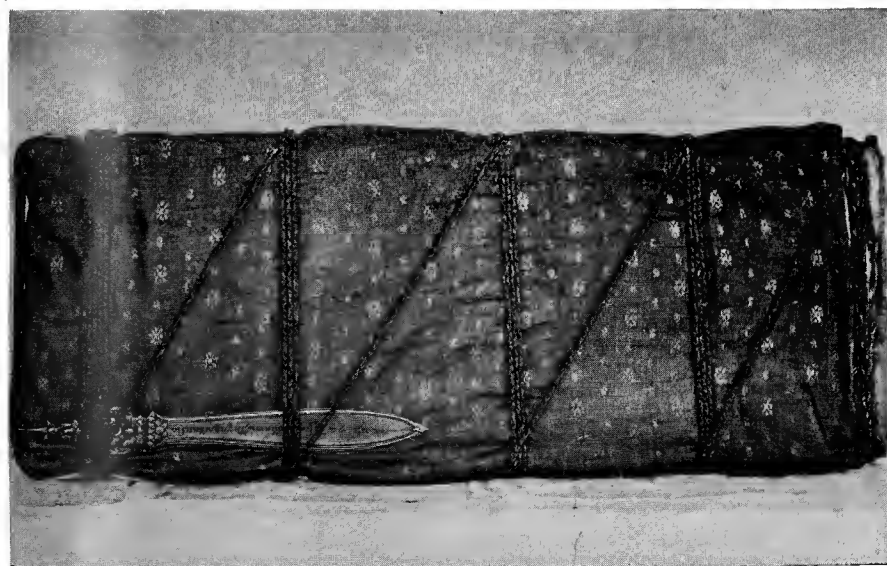
In Siam, as in other countries professing Singhalese Buddhism, religious manuscripts are written on leaves of the corypha palm. Formerly it was the custom for each temple to possess a plantation of these trees, in order to provide a ready supply of palm leaves for making manuscripts. But in some parts of Siam there are natural forests of the corypha palm, for instance, in Bejrabun and Lom Sak in the Nam Sak valley. The process of preparing the palm leaves, and the way in which scribes use them for copying religious books, have been carefully described by Montgomery Schuyler in a paper entitled "Notes on the making of palm-leaf manuscripts in Siam" published in 1908.

"The leaves of the palm tree are brought in from the country in large bundles, each leaf being about eighteen inches long and doubled in the middle. These leaves are given to the priest by the peasants as a means of "making merit." The first operation in converting the leaves into the finished manuscript is to divide them by cutting out the midrib, thus making two leaves of each leaf of the tree. These leaves are then made up into bundles of some hundred pieces each and are then placed between boards tightly tied up and wedged in a press. While still there, the edges of the leaves are trimmed smoothly with a semi-circular knife which is in a handle some two feet long. After sanding the leaves to give them a smooth surface for writing or rather inscribing, the bundles are then ready for the next stage in the book-making process.

"After the surface of the leaves has been sanded and made in good condition for receiving the strokes of the scribe's stylus, the

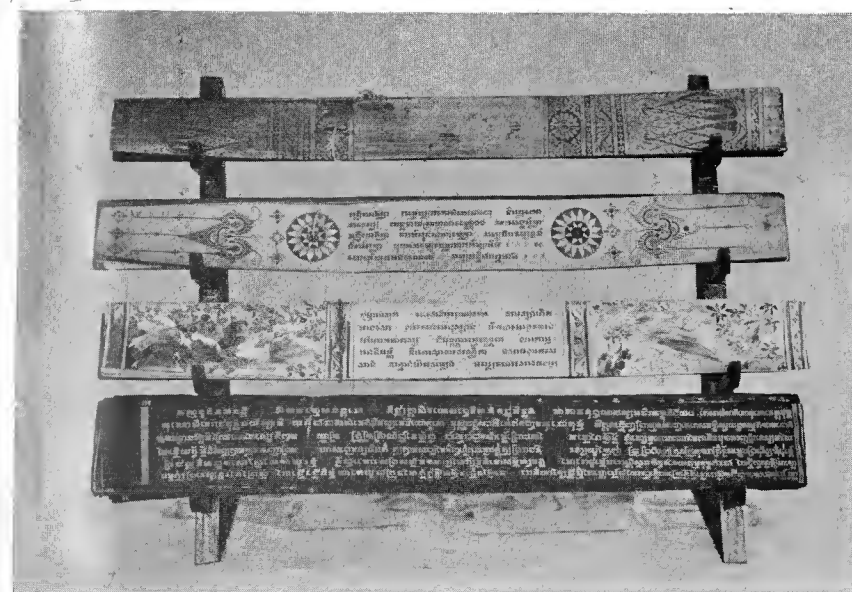
actual copying of the books can begin. Each copyist has in front of him, as he squats on the floor of the temple, a frame about eighteen inches in height somewhat resembling an artist's easel, on one ledge of which rests the manuscripts to be copied and on the other ledge the blank leaves for the new volume. The pen or rather the stylus is a needle-point, like a needle of a sewing-machine, inserted in a wooden handle resembling an enormous cigar about eight inches in length. Before doing any writing the scribe marks lines, usually five in number, on each leaf by means of strings which are placed in a frame with the ends tied and the rest loose. These strings are then blackened with soot from the bottom of a rice-pot, and the strings are placed in position over the palm-leaf and then snapped. The result is a series of lightly marked black lines on the leaf which serves the writer as a guide for his stylus. The copyist then holds the blank leaf in his hand and with the needle point scratches the letters of the text on the prepared surface of the leaf. It is remarkable how the writer holds the leaf in his hand and does not rest it upon any surface for steadiness. The letters when scratched are, of course, almost invisible unless carefully examined, as no colouring substance is put on the pen point. In order to render the writing clearer the entire surface of the leave is smeared with soot and then wiped off and scoured with clean sand. The black adheres to the scratches and is removed from the rest of the surface by the sand. When a sufficient number of pages are ready, they are placed in a press and the edges trimmed off and sometimes gilded. The leaves are formed into a volume by being tied together with a string running through holes in the middle of the leaf. Each leaf is usually written on both sides, so that there are two pages of five lines each on every palm-leaf. A book almost always consists of twelve, and a double book of twenty four, leaves."

A Pāli work consists usually of several "books" or, more correctly, bundles (Siamese, *phūk*) of palm-leaves, which are placed between two covers (Siamese, *krop*) in order to give more firmness to the manuscript, when afterwards tied and wrapped in cloth. These panels, which are sometimes real works of art, are made of lacquered teak wood (adorned with gold designs or incrustated with mother-of-



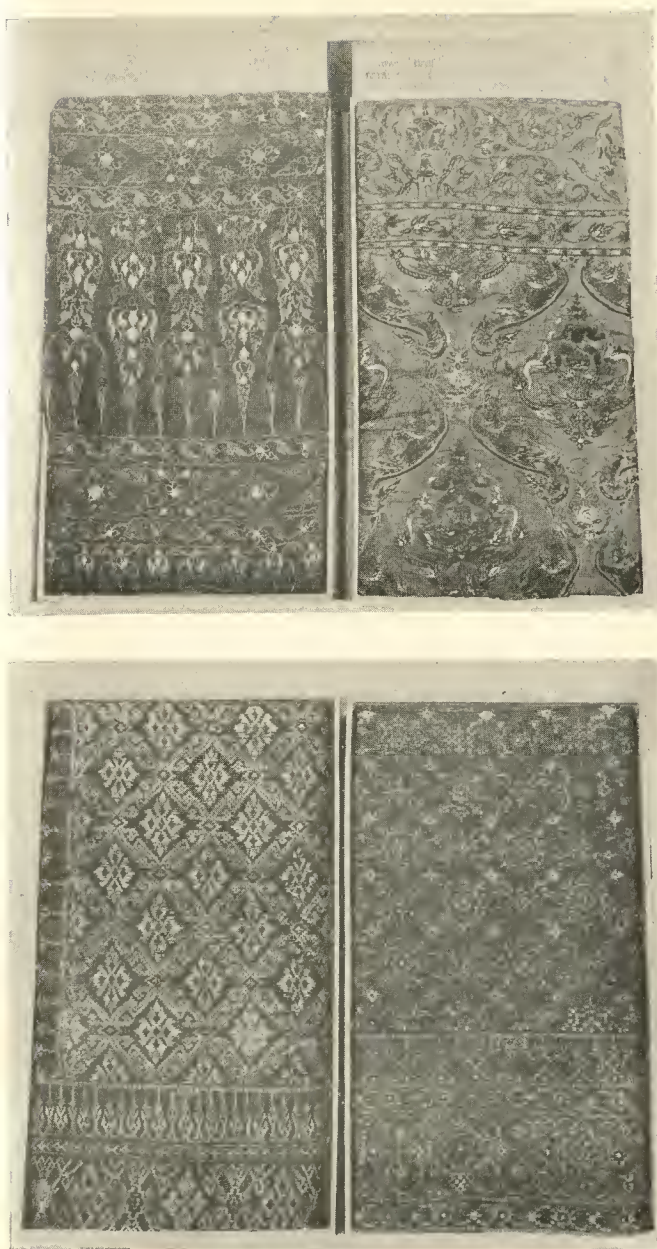
Above: Pāli manuscript wrapped in cloth and tied (with a slip bearing its title).

Below: Folding desk used for reading Pāli manuscripts.



Above : Decorated Pāli manuscripts.

Below : Covers of Pāli manuscripts.



Cloths used for wrapping Pāli manuscripts.
(Embroidery and Siamese brocade).

pearl), or of carved ivory, or of silver (inlaid with niello or enamel), or of other precious material. Some of the best specimens are exhibited in a special show-case in the Library.

The cloths in which palm-leaf manuscripts are finally wrapped deserve special mention. It was an old custom in Siam for fine cloths formerly used as garments but worn out, or belonging to deceased persons, to be presented to the priests for use as wrappings for their manuscripts. A considerable number of the manuscripts in the National Library are wrapped in old and beautiful cloths of every description; some delicately embroidered, some made of Indian or Siamese brocade, and others of a special kind of cotton, printed in India with Siamese designs. Many of these cloths date from the time when Ayudhyā was the Capital, and the exhibits at the Library form a fairly complete collection of specimens of Siamese textile art.

To the cord used for tying up the cloth round the manuscript is usually fixed a kind of slip resembling in shape and size a European paper-knife and bearing the title of the work. These slips, which are made of wood, ivory, or gilded copper, have also provided Siamese artists with an occasion for exercising their taste and skill.

The cases made as receptacles for religious manuscripts are one of the most characteristic and interesting productions of Siamese art, and are the chief object of interest, at least for passing visitors, to be seen in the National Library.

Bundles of manuscripts, after being wrapped in cloth and tied up, have a uniform average length of 0m.60. It follows therefore that the book-cases, in which they are to be kept, will have a uniform average depth of 0m.70 to 0m.75, their height and breadth being more subject to modification. Each of the four sides of the book-case has that trapezoidal form, which is such a striking feature of modern Siamese architecture. The book-cases open on one side only by means of a double door, which can be locked with an ordinary padlock. Several of the oldest cases are erected on a kind of pedestal or plinth made of carved wood. But usually, they simply stand on four legs, either straight or bent after the Chinese fashion.

The sacred character of the manuscripts kept in the book-cases is a sufficient reason for the decoration which adorns three, if not four, of their sides. Various processes of decoration have been adopted by Siamese artists. The method least frequently met with is carving, and the National Library possesses only two specimens of that kind. Incrustation of glassware has been in use, too, but the result, though gorgeous, is rather barbaric and not particularly tasteful. Far more interesting are those book-cases where the panels are inlaid with mother-of-pearl in a deep layer of black lacquer. The best specimen made during the first reign of the present dynasty (1782-1809) is to be seen in the Library of Wat Phra Keo. The National Library possesses two magnificent specimens made during the reign of King Rāma III. "The art was probably introduced originally from China," says Graham (Siam, vol. II, page 161) "but has long ago acquired a quite distinctively Siamese form. The shell which is cut into small pieces of a sufficient variety of shapes, is set in while the lacquer, which has been applied previously, is still soft, and the whole surface is subsequently allowed to harden, when it is ground down to an absolute smoothness and polished."

But the book-cases in carved wood or in inlaid lacquer-ware form a very small minority when compared with the lacquer and gilt cases, of which the National Library possesses over 300. "This work," says Graham (Vol. II, page 160), "which is now unfortunately almost a lost art, once upon a time had very clever exponents in Siam, and their productions are now highly valued. It consists of an immense variety of designs worked out in gilding upon a smooth black surface of lacquer." This process, which has been also used for decorating temple doors and windows, is worth describing in some detail.

After the lacquer has been applied three or four times on the wood panel and is absolutely dry and hard, the artist places on it the drawing to be reproduced, all the lines of which have been previously perforated with a needle. He rubs it over with chalk dust, and thus obtains a white sketch on a black ground. The next step consists in covering the surfaces, which are designed to remain



Lacquer and gilt Bookcase erected on a plinth of carved wood
(XVII-XVIIIth Century).



Lacquer and gilt Bookcase dated B. E. 2331 (1788 A.D.)



Side panel of a lacquer and gilt Bookcase
standing on bent legs.



Lacquer and gilt Bookcase
showing characters of the Siamese Rāmāyana
in spiral designs inspired from the Khmer art.



Lacquer and gilt Bookcase
decorated with figures of Brahminic deities
(early XIXth Century).



Door of a lacquer and gilt Bookcase
showing mythical beings on a background
decorated with *kanok*.

black, with a paint which will prevent the gold from adhering to them. This is done by means of a liquid usually made of realgar powder (Siamese, *horadan*) mixed with gum from the fruit of the *Feronia Elephantum* (Siamese, *makhwit*) and with an acid extracted from the shell of the *Acacia rugata* (Siamese, *som poi*). With a thin and sharp brush, the artist applies this yellow paint all over the surface which he wishes to blacken, so that the result is a kind of negative, where the prospective black surfaces are yellow and the prospective gilt surfaces are black. When the realgar is perfectly dry, the artist applies on the whole surface a very thin layer of lacquer, just sticky enough to enable gold to adhere, and he covers the whole panel with gold leaf, leaving no portion of the drawing discernible. The gold will then stick permanently to the lacquer on which no realgar has been applied, but the problem remains to remove the realgar with the gold which covers it, in order to obtain the black background of the design. For this purpose the artist covers the whole surface once more with small pieces of wet blotting paper, and when he thinks that the water has sufficiently dissolved the realgar (through the very thin gold leaf), he simply washes out the panel. The gold which adheres directly to the lacquer is not affected by the washing, but the blotting paper and the realgar are carried away, leaving a perfectly clean black background upon which the gilt design appears sharply outlined.

Such is the method which was employed in ancient times. It is still practised by the few craftsmen who are able to perform this kind of work.

The drawings which cover the panels of the book-cases represent various scenes, where the actors stand out clearly against the purely ornamental designs of the background. These scenes are either religious, taken from the life of the Buddha including his former births; or literary, representing episodes from the Siamese *Rāmāyana* or other famous plays of the National Theatre. But in some cases no scenes are represented, each panel being simply covered with ornamental designs, or with the representation of a deity or some other figure of large size.

Among the patterns employed by Siamese artists, the most and the most characteristic is the *kanok*, which is said to be from the riceflower and resembles a flame.

Some cases which betray Chinese inspiration, if not direct workmanship, admit an adjunction of colour (*Kammalo*). These cases are quite old, and possess a real artistic value.

In addition to book-cases in the shape of cupboards, chests are used to preserve religious manuscripts on palm leaves. Every possesses an interesting collection of these chests which are used in the same manner as the book-cases just referred to, and go to a period not later than the end of the XVIIIth century.

In order to complete the tale, mention must also be made of cases in which a single manuscript is kept. They are used in various cases, on the occasion of various religious ceremonies when a sermon is delivered or prayers read. Beautiful specimens, some inlaid with mother-of-pearl, are exhibited in the Library as show cases.

Having now described the manufacture of palm-leaf manuscripts and the materials used for keeping them, we shall now proceed to give some general information about the various collections of manuscripts preserved in the National Library.

European scholars usually divide Pāli manuscripts into three classes: Singhalese, Burmese and Cambodian manuscripts.

The last term needs some modification, since the large majority of Cambodian manuscripts come from Siam and not from Cambodia.

When the Thai came into contact with the Khmer civilisation and adopted the writing of their neighbours, they modified it for vernacular use but kept it intact for copying Pāli texts. The expression "Cambodian manuscripts" is correct, therefore, as far as it goes, but it should be clearly understood that the majority of Siamese manuscripts are mostly of Siamese origin.



Above: Chest used for keeping Pāli manuscripts.

Below: Box used for keeping sermons.



Above: Chest used for keeping Pāli manuscripts.

Below: Box used for keeping Prayer books.

The collection of Cambodian Pāli manuscripts in the Vajirañāṇa National Library is certainly the richest in the world, but the great bulk of them are of recent date and posterior to the foundation of Bangkok in 1782. The burning of the ancient Capital Ayudhyā, in 1767, resulted in the destruction of a considerable number of old documents, and Pāli texts anterior to that date are easier to find in Europe than in Siam; for instance, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, at Paris, whose Pāli manuscripts were mostly collected by French missionaries during the XVIIth. and XVIIIth. centuries.

Nevertheless, the Vajirañāṇa National Library possesses a small quantity of Pāli manuscripts copied during the XVIIIth., XVIIth., XVIth., and even the XVth. centuries, the oldest manuscript actually known being a commentary of the Saṃyuttanikāya copied in B. E. 1938, in the year of the Monkey, equivalent to 1440 A. D. Samples of those venerable relics, which show in an interesting manner the evolution of Cambodian writing in Siam, are on view in a special case.

When, after the destruction of Ayudhyā by the Burmese, Phya Tāk re-established the independence of Siam, and brought the Capital to Thonburi (on the west bank of the Menam, opposite Bangkok), he made an effort to restore the Royal Collection of Sacred Scriptures. He brought a certain number of Pāli manuscripts back from his campaign against Nakhon Sri Thammarat, and also obtained others from neighbouring countries, such as Cambodia. In 1922 about one hundred manuscripts belonging to Phya Tāk's Royal Library were discovered at Wat Rakhang, and were at once removed to the National Library.

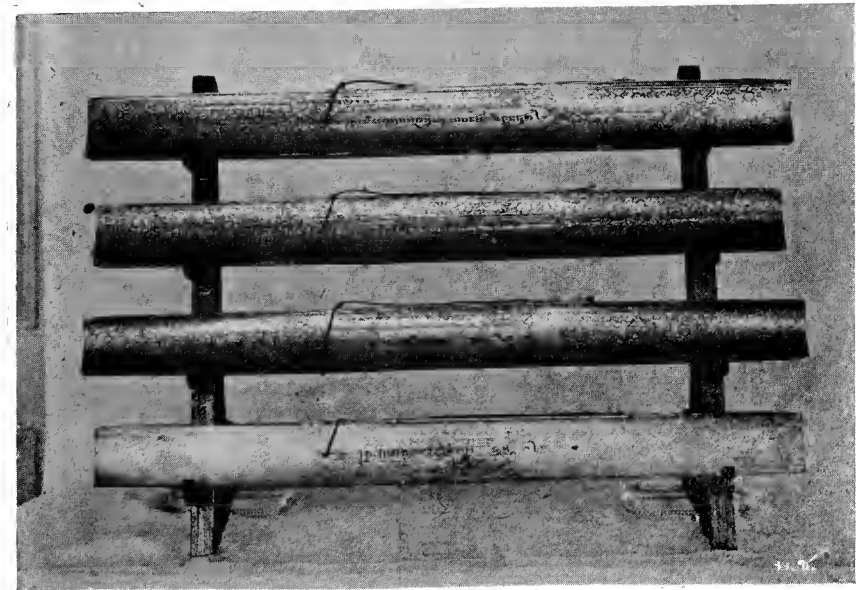
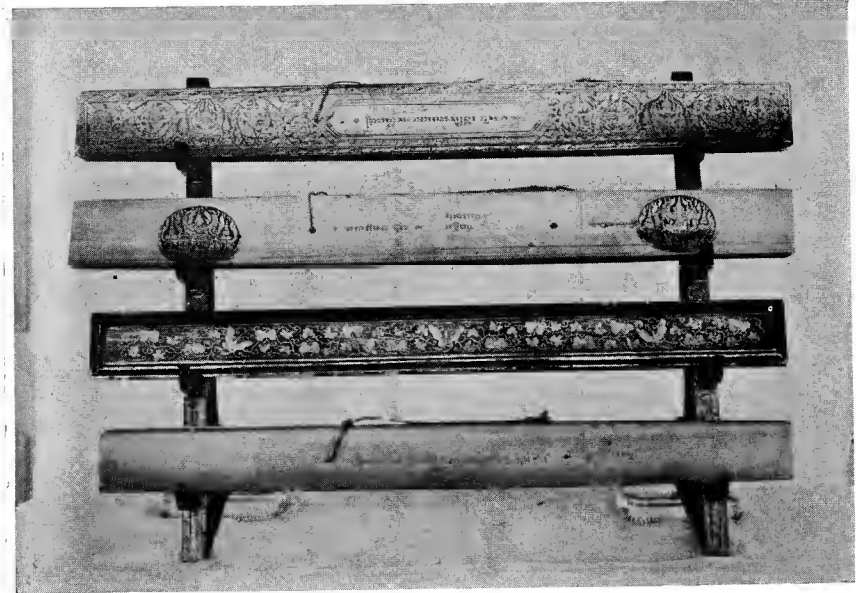
During the first year of his reign, King Rāma I had a complete copy of the Scriptures made, but it was soon discovered that this copy was full of mistakes. In 1788, the King decided that a general revision of the Tripiṭaka should be undertaken by competent scholars and a Council was appointed, consisting of 219 priests under the presidency of Somdet Phra Sangharat Si, and of Rājapandits. The

Council began its work in the precincts of Wat Mahādhāt (behind the National Library) towards the end of 1788, and sat for over four months, revising and correcting the copy of the Tripitaka made by King Rāma I at the beginning of His reign. This edition of the Scriptures, of which the chief characteristic is the great number of corrections made, was formerly called "Edition of the Council" (Siamese, *Chabab Sangāyanā*), but is now better known by the name of "Edition of the Old Masters" (*Chabab Grū Doem*). It consisted originally of 288 manuscripts, making a total number of 3,568 *phūk*, or bundles of palm-leaves. A good proportion of this first Royal Edition of the Bangkok dynasty is still preserved and kept in the Library of Wat Phra Keo.

Shortly after the Council had been held, a clean copy of the Scriptures, with the addition of some works not included in the former one, was made by order of the King, and placed in a pavilion specially erected for that purpose in the precincts of Wat Phra Keo. This pavilion was destroyed by fire on the very day of its inauguration, but the manuscripts were fortunately rescued. This copy which comprised originally 354 manuscripts (3,686 *phūk*), a number of which are now missing, is still kept in the Library of Wat Phra Keo. As the covering leaves of each bundle were entirely gilt on their outside, this edition was called the "Grand Gilt Edition" (*Chabab Thong Yai*).

A subsidiary copy of the "Gilt Edition", composed of 305 manuscripts (3,649 *phūk*), was also made during King Rāma I's reign. It was called "Secondary" (*Chabab Rong Song*) and is characterized by the gilt and red lacquer designs which cover the margins of each manuscript.

To make the list complete, one must not forget to mention another fragmentary edition written with ink in a special form of Cambodian writing (*Khōm yō*). The covering palm-leaves are adorned with a gilt and black lacquer pattern. Of this edition, which is called "*Jup Yō*," only 35 manuscripts are known.



Royal Editions of the Buddhist Scriptures.
(Second and Third Reign).

Such are the copies of the Pāli Tripiṭaka known to have been made by order of King Rāma I. But it may be confidently assumed that, besides these "Royal Editions", many Pāli manuscripts were copied by order of the King and presented to various temples, and that during His reign a considerable number were also copied by private persons. Many of these manuscripts are preserved in the National Library.

During King Rāma II's reign, only one copy of the Scriptures was made. It was not actually complete, when He died, and was finished by His successors. It is now known as the "Red Lacquer Edition" (*Chabab Rot Nam Daeng*), because the title page of each *phūk* bears a gilt and red lacquer design representing "Garudas" and other deities.

King Rāma III was the author of seven different editions, the exact dates of which are not known, and some of which were still unfinished at the time of His demise. The most beautiful of Rāma III's editions, and perhaps of all the Bangkok Royal Editions, is the "First Gilt and Black Lacquer Edition" (*Chabab Rot Nam Ek*), so called because the cover of each *phūk* bears a beautiful ornamental design in gold on black. Every care was taken to secure a first-class copy: the palm-leaves were specially selected, the copyists were chosen amongst the best calligraphers of the Kingdom, the frames were made of precious materials, and Indian brocade was used for wrapping the manuscripts, But, as usual, no great care was taken to ensure the preservation of this magnificent collection, which has suffered badly from the rain and the attacks of white ants.

Another copy of the same type but less elaborate is known as the "Second Gilt and Black Lacquer Edition" (*Chabab Rot Nam Tho*).

The "Little Gilt Edition" (*Chabab Thong Noi*), similar to Rāma I's Gilt Edition, but on smaller palm-leaves, was written exclusively by female copyists.

The "Deb Jumnum" edition, especially made for Wat Phra Jetubon (Wat Po), has on the cover of each *phūk* a pleasing design in gold on black lacquer, representing an assembly of devas (*Deb Jumnum*).

Another edition made for Wat Rājācoros is known as the "*Kammalo*" edition, because the frames of each manuscript have an ornamental design on Chinese lacquer (*Kammalo*), of a uniform pattern.

During Rāma III's reign, the *Jub Yo* edition, begun by Rāma I, was continued, on somewhat smaller leaves, and a copy of the scriptures in Mon writing was also started, King Mongkut completing it later on.

King Mongkut's reign was chiefly devoted to the completion of the various sets of scriptures which had been left unfinished by His predecessors, but a new edition was also made, viz. the "Vermilion Edition" (*Chabab Long Jat*), the margins of which are covered with gold and red painting.

King Chulalongkorn also ordered a new copy of the Scriptures to be made. It is called the "Gilt Edition" (*Chabab Thong Thiip*) because the covering leaves of each bundle are entirely gilt, like King Rāma I's "*Thong Yai*" Edition. This was the last Royal Copy on palm-leaves, and King Chulalongkorn inaugurated the printing of the Scriptures by publishing the famous Jubilee Edition on the occasion of the 25th. Anniversary of His accession to the Throne, in 1893.

All the Royal Editions, with the exception of the first two (Council Edition and Grand Gilt Edition) which are kept in Wat Phra Keo, are now carefully preserved in the National Library: they are more or less incomplete, many manuscripts having gone astray in the course of time. Besides the Royal Editions, the National Library has in its keeping several collections of Pāli manuscripts, the most interesting of which are a collection of manuscripts previously belonging to renowned scholars and still bearing their annotations. Of



A Temple's Library
before and after its classification
at the National Library.

the Pāli works which are known to exist, only a few are not represented in the Library by one or more copies. Those works, which were not originally included in the Siamese collection of the Pāli Scriptures, have been carefully noted down, and recently purchased or copied either in Ceylon or in Burma, by kind permission of the British Government.

The reverse also happens at times, and Siamese manuscripts are occasionally borrowed from the National Library by European and Singhalese scholars who are preparing text-editions.

The National Library is still able, from time to time, to incorporate interesting Pāli manuscripts coming from various temples in Siam. There are many temples which possess important collections of manuscripts, but let them fall into decay, either through lack of interest or because there is no teacher to make use of them. The usual procedure followed is to request the Chief Priest of the temple in question to send his whole collection of manuscripts to the National Library: there they are classified by a special body of experts, and, after being properly wrapped in new cloths, are, if wanted, returned to the temple with a catalogue. If any rare or important work is discovered amongst the manuscripts, it is retained by the Library. Such work benefits both parties, the temple having its library saved from decay and duly classified, and the National Library standing a chance of obtaining important manuscripts. Many scattered manuscripts from the Royal editions and the remnants of Phya Tāk's library were discovered in this way.

SIAMESE MANUSCRIPTS ON PAPER

A Siamese book usually consists of a long strip of thick paper (about 0m.38 wide) folded backwards and forwards into "accordion pleats." This paper is made of the bark of the *Streblus aspera* (Siamese, *Khoi*). The bark is first boiled with lime, the pulp thus obtained, after being thoroughly washed, is applied with a roll to a piece of cloth stretched on a wooden frame, where it remains exposed to the sun till it is dry.

The natural colour of the paper is yellowish-grey, and when it is dry, it is ready for use without further preparation, in which case the material used for writing is either ink or black pencil. But very often the surface of the paper is blackened with lacquer, or with a paste containing charcoal powder. In such cases the scribes use either a soft white or yellowish pencil resembling a stick of chalk, or else gamboge (sometimes even liquid gold) flowing from a kind of primitive fountain-pen in bamboo.

These were the materials used by scribes before the introduction of printing in Siam, and Siamese manuscripts on black paper (*Samut thai dam*) or white paper (*Samut thai khao*) include works and documents of every description.

The collection of Siamese manuscripts on paper in the Vajirañāṇa National Library is divided into several sections, viz.:

- Prayer Books and Religious Works,
- Literature (theatre, fiction, poetry, etc.),
- History,
- Technical Treatises,
- Laws,
- Archives,

Siamese manuscripts on paper dating from the time when Ayudhyā was the Capital of the Kingdom, are as scarce as Pāli manuscripts on palm-leaves, for the same reason, i.e., the destruction of Ayudhyā by the Burmese. Nevertheless, each of the sections above-mentioned contains important manuscripts, which, if not very old, constitute a collection unrivalled in any other country. These manuscripts, which are considered the most interesting for visitors to see, either on account of their artistic value or because they are representative of a special class of work, are exhibited in a series of show-cases.

PRAYER BOOKS deserve special mention as they are usually written with great care in a kind of ornamental hand-writing, and are very often illuminated with religious subjects. Amongst the books in this section, may be mentioned the story of Phra Malai, the priest who visited Heaven and Hell. This legend, which is illustrated with pictures representing the tortures of the damned, is written in large sized books, in which may also be found common prayers for use at various ceremonies. Such books are kept in special boxes decorated in the same style as the book-cases, and of these the Library possesses an interesting collection.

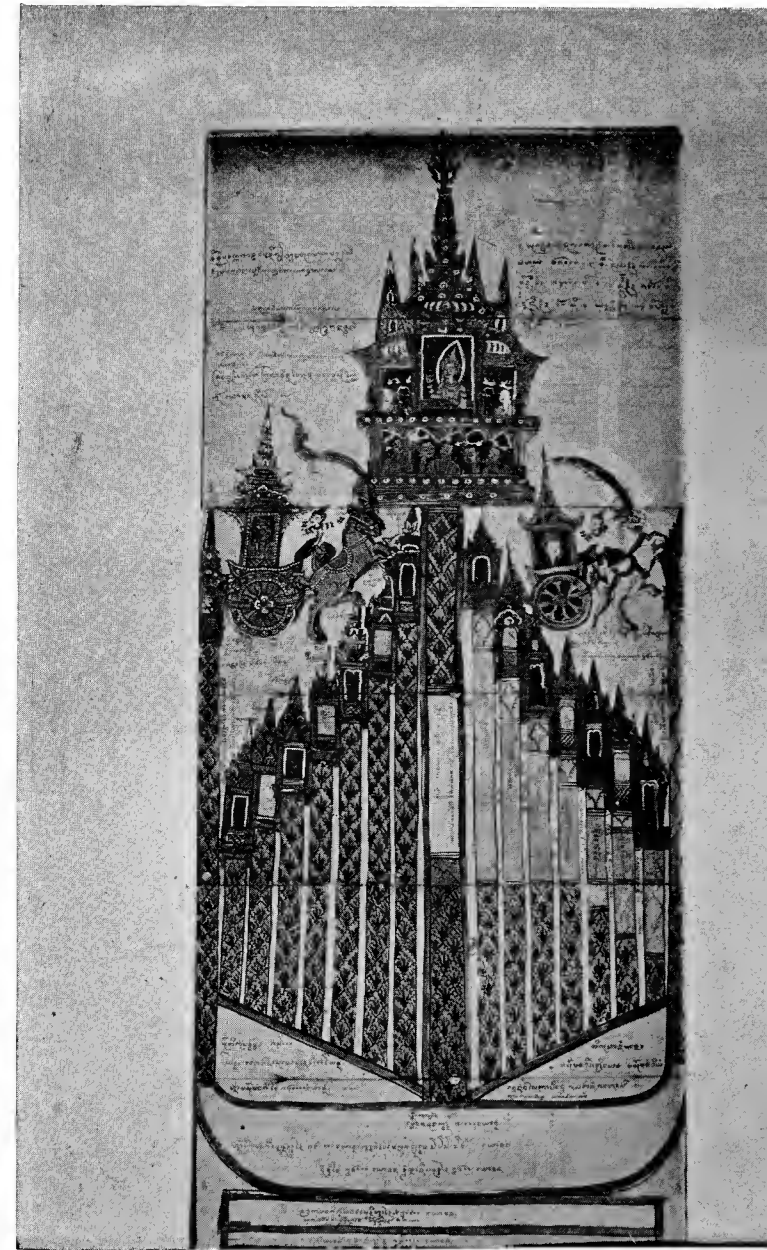
MANUSCRIPTS OF LITERARY, HISTORICAL, AND LEGAL WORKS do not present any special interest for the passing visitor. But the unique collection of such works preserved in the National Library contains a large amount of original information about Siam, its history, its literature and its institutions, and although a number of these manuscripts have been printed and published within recent years, this collection will constitute a rich mine of research for the scholar and the student for a long time to come.

TECHNICAL TREATISES (*Tamrā*) will, it is thought, appeal to the interest of visitors to a much greater extent, on account of their being profusely illustrated. A dozen show-cases exhibit the most curious among them.

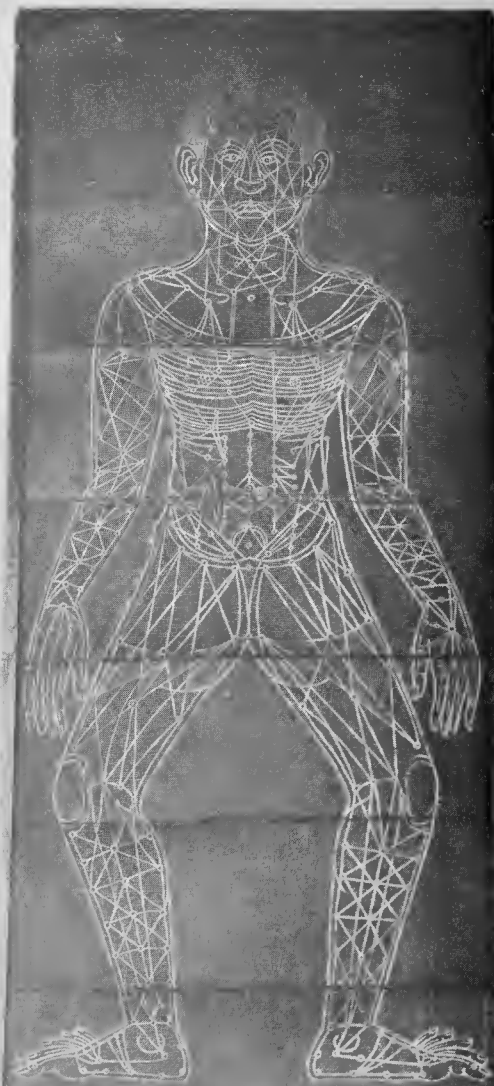
Buddhist Cosmology and traditional geography are represented by various copies of the *Traibhūmī*, which give a complete description of the universe according to the Buddhist conception.



Prayer Book.



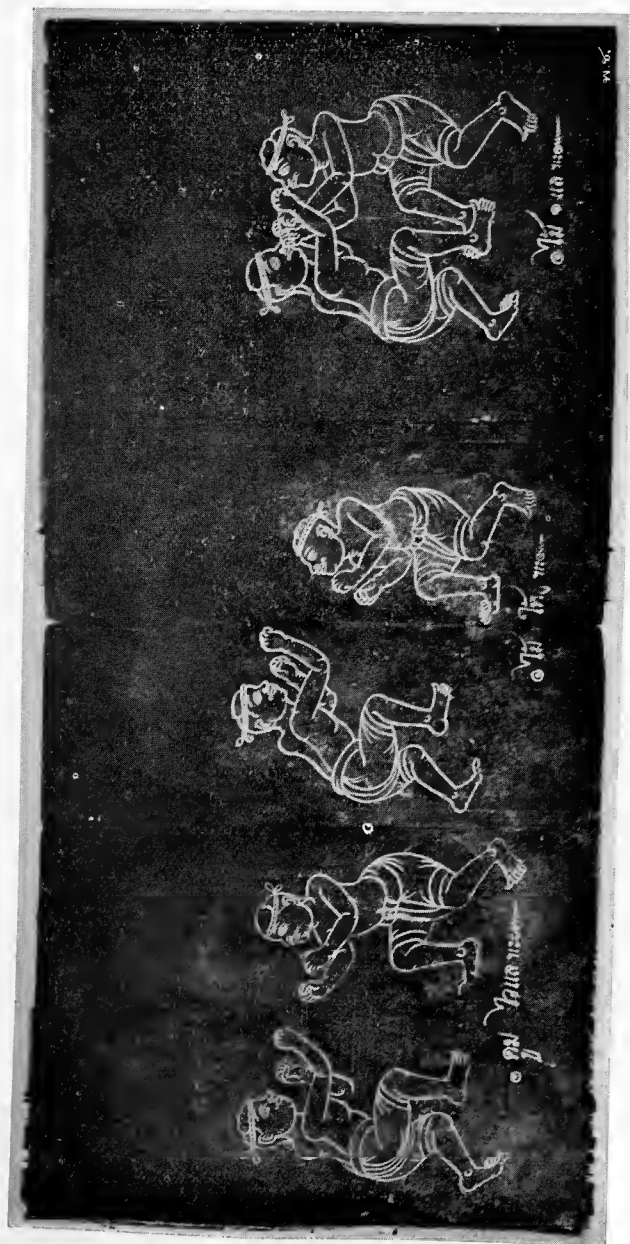
Buddhist Cosmology (Traibhūmī).
The seven mountains encircling Mount Meru
(Laotian manuscript, XVIIIth Century).



The human body
after a Treatise on Massage.



Treatise on Gymnastics.



Treatise on Boxing

Astrology, Alchemy, and Magic are also represented by an important number of manuscripts..

Medicine and the sciences relating thereto have always been in great honour among the Siamese, and the Library possesses a number of old medical books dating as far back as the reign of Phra Nārāyana (second half of the XVIIth. Century). Treatises on small-pox usually give a series of demoniac figures which are supposed to preside over the different forms of that disease, and the Library possesses an excellent manuscript on the subject which has already been studied by European doctors.

Massage, which is still in vogue among skilled practitioners, has been the subject of scientific studies, and the books on massage preserved in the Library give a very interesting drawing of the human body. Besides massage, the Siamese practise a kind of gymnastics in order to cure certain pains in different parts of the body, and the different positions and gestures appropriate to each pain are to be seen on small stone slabs fixed on the pillars of the gallery in Wat Jetubon. The same figures are reproduced in a manuscript exhibited in the Library.

Among the fine arts :

Architecture is represented by an interesting treatise on cremation-buildings in the time of Ayudhyā ;

Drawing, by a considerable number of sketches by renowned artists (such as In Khong of Bejrapuri);

Buddhistic and Brahminic Iconography, by manuscripts showing the traditional attitudes of the Buddha during successive episodes of his life, as well as by the various deities of the Hindu Pantheon ;

Dancing (and the Theatre), by several treatises showing the various figures known to Siamese choreography (1).

One of the favourite sports of the Siamese is *Boxing*, the technique of which is fully described in a curious treatise.

(1) Published by H. R. H. Prince Damrong in 1923 on the occasion of the cremation of the late Prince of Bejrabun.

The *Breeding* of elephants and horses is also represented by manuscripts beautifully illustrated.

The *Art of war*, as practised by the Siamese before the introduction of European methods, is described in the "*Tamrā Vijaya Saṅgrāma*." A beautiful edition written with gold letters in 1809 deserves special mention. Finally, royal ceremonies and processions are the subjects of several illuminated manuscripts.

In this connection reference may be made to some curious manuscripts used by the Court Brahmins. They are in Sanskrit, written in Southern Indian form (i. e. the Grantha character) which is still understood and written by a few of the Court brahmins. Though the language has become sadly corrupt, the text consists of vedic mantras and fragments of āgamas, or ritual, which appear to be of very ancient origin.

ARCHIVES constitute an important section of the Department of Siamese Manuscripts. The sources from which these have been drawn are threefold. From its foundation, the Library has possessed a few documents of this nature. Later, the archives of the Ministry of the Interior were, for want of room, housed in the National Library. Finally, when it became clear to the Council of the National Library that such documents were of considerable historical value from a national point of view, the various Ministries were asked to hand over all their documents belonging or anterior to King Mongkut's reign (which ended in 1868). The collection thus formed contains a number of very valuable documents, several of which have been already printed by the Library. Their classification is sometimes difficult, as in ancient times documents relating to widely different subjects were often written in the same book, but considerable progress has already been made in the task of cataloguing these documents and rendering them accessible to readers.

Archives anterior to the foundation of Bangkok are very rare, but among them two series of documents require special notice.

One series, which was discovered at Patalung in the Malay Peninsula, contains grants of land and slaves (*kalpanā*) to various

[illegible]

Archives of the First Reign.
Royal Order for the performance
of the Tonsure Ceremony (1802 A.D.)

amples in 1699 A. D. Amongst this series was also found a document in the Cambodian language but in a character entirely different from any known to have been used in Cambodia, and which exhibits a peculiar mixture of Grantha, Cambodian, and Siamese elements.

The other series of documents just referred to was obtained in Annam (now a province of French Laos) by Chao Phya Surisak during his campaign against the Black Flags. It consists of Royal Decrees of the Kings of Vieng Chan and Luang Prabang, written some on cloth and some on palm-leaves, appointing officials for the administration of various districts, mostly during the XVIIth.—XVIIIth. centuries.

SIAMESE PRINTED BOOKS

The first Siamese type was made in Calcutta for the purpose of editing Capt. J. Low's "Grammar of the Thai or Siamese language", printed in 1828 at the Baptist Mission Press, and the same type was sent by the first American missionaries to Siam.

The following extracts from the "Chronicle of noticeable events in Siam," published in the *Bangkok Calendar* for the year 1860, give an interesting résumé of the beginnings of Siamese printing.

"1835. — *July*. The gospel of Matthew in Siamese by Rev. J. T. Jones, having been printed at Singapore, was brought to Siam for eirculation.

"*July 18*. Rev. Wm. Dean, missionary of the Am. Bapt. Board, and D. B. Bradley M. D., missionary of the A. B. C. F. M., and family arrived in Bangkok. The first printing press put into operation in Siam was then brought to Bangkok under the auspices of the A. B. C. F. M.

"1836. — *June 3*. The first printing by press in Siam was done by Rev. C. Robinson on an old fashioned press, made of wood and stone. It was a sheet tract in Siamese. The type had been cast in Bengal and brought to Bangkok with the press, both being very ugly.

"*July 2*. Rev. Messrs. Davenport and Reed, missionaries of the Am. Bapt. Board, arrived in Bangkok with their families, and brought with them a Printing press, and the necessary accompaniments for the establishment of a thorough printing office.

"1837.—*February 8*. Two new printing Presses, two standing presses and other materials for the establishment of another complete printing office arrived, being sent out by the A.B.C.F.M.

"1839.—April 27. The King's proclamation, contraband opium, was printed at the Press of the A. B. C. F. M., 9000 being issued. It was the first Government document ever printed in Siam.

"1841.—October. The mission of A. B. C. F. M. at Bangkok established a type foundry, particularly for their Siamese documents, from which time the Siamese type began to be improved at that foundry, until the kind now used in the office of the A. B. C. F. M. was brought to its present state of improvement in 1847.

"1843.—January 12. The mission of the A. B. C. F. M. published the first printed Almanac in Siam. It was in the Siamese language, with the usual completeness of Almanacs in Europe and America. A small work on astronomy, in the Siamese language, was soon afterward issued from the press of the same mission.

"1844.—July 4. The first Newspaper ever printed in Siam was issued from the Press of the A. B. C. F. M. printed in the Siamese language. Its name was 'The Bangkok Recorder.'

It was about the same time that the Roman Catholic Mission began to print religious tracts in the Siamese character.

Before His accession to the Throne, and during His stay at Wat Bovoranivet as a monk, H. M. King Mongkut established there a small Press, the first purely Siamese press of Siam, which was subsequently transferred to Wat Rajapradit.

Until 1866, the only types in use were those of the American Baptist Mission. From 1867 onwards, better looking types were cast on the spot. Nowadays, as regards correctness, elegance and promptitude, the principal Presses of Bangkok have reached a high standard.

Since the coming into force of the Books, Documents and Newspapers Law, B. E. 2465 (promulgated on the 23rd. January 1922), the National Library receives two copies of every book, document or newspaper printed in Siam. The Department of Siamese Printed Books is thus continually increasing its stock, which already consists of a fairly complete collection of books printed in Siam.

FOREIGN PRINTED BOOKS

The Department of Foreign (i. e. non-Siamese) Printed Books is not yet as important as it ought to be, for several reasons, the chief of which is that credits for buying books are still very limited. But, thanks to exchange with the various foreign institutions previously mentioned, the National Library receives most of the foreign technical publications issued, and the reader is thus able to remain in touch with the progress of oriental researches.

Besides this ever increasing supply, the 12,000 volumes actually kept in the Department of Foreign printed books have been derived from two distinct sources. Some come from the old Vajirañāṇa Library, others are recent purchases.

The old Vajirañāṇa Library possessed a good collection of books on History, Law, the Fine Arts, etc., which, while somewhat obsolete, are still of a certain value as reference-works.

As regards new purchases, they are at present confined to books of immediate use for the study of Siam and the neighbouring countries, thus covering the field of what is commonly called "Oriental Studies."

The collection of books strictly relating to Siam is exhaustive, and contains, for example, all the relations of those travellers and ambassadors who visited Siam during the XVIIth. Century. In this connection may be mentioned, although they are not printed books, the copies made by order of the National Library (with the kind permission of the respective governments) of documents kept in the India Office, London, in the Archives of the Ministère des Colonies, Paris, and in the State Archives, The Hague. These are invaluable

documents for the study of Siamese history, since the National Archives of Siam were utterly destroyed in 1767.

After books on Siam and Oriental countries, special attention has been given to books of geography and travel, to grammars and dictionaries, and to works on religion, especially Buddhism. Besides the standard European works on the national religion of Siam, the Library possesses two complete sets of the Chinese Tripitaka, thus forming a distinct Chinese section which also comprises the Annals of the 24 dynasties.

An important collection of Sanskrit texts has been recently acquired, and will be of great value to Siamese scholars who are now taking an ever increasing interest in the ancient literature of India.

The map section is still poor, and with the exception of the maps of Siam published by the Royal Survey Department of the Army, possesses only the maps issued by the Geodetic Survey of the United States of America.

ARCHAEOLOGY

By a Royal Proclamation dated the 17th. January 1924, the conservation of the Ancient Monuments in Siam has been vested in the Council of the National Library. Even before that wise and far reaching measure was decided upon by His Majesty the King, the Council of the National Library had already taken an important step towards the preservation of national antiquities, by housing in the galleries a considerable number of original inscriptions.

Inscriptions discovered in Siamese territory have an immense value for students of the history of the country before the advent of the Thai, and of Thai history before the foundation of Ayudhyā in 1350 A. D., from which date the Siamese Annals begin to give a continuous relation.

The National Library has now in its keeping 34 inscribed stones, some of which are of paramount importance, and can be reckoned among the most venerable relics of the past.

From the time when the Southern Menam valley was still occupied by a population speaking a Mon dialect, there is a stone pillar discovered at Lopburi, and bearing a Mon inscription of the VIIth. or VIIIth century A. D.

Three Sanskrit inscriptions from Jaiya and Vieng Sa (Malay Peninsula) are among the documents which enabled the author of the present notice to prove some years ago the existence of the powerful kingdom of Çrivijaya, whose capital was at Palembang (Sumatra), and which extended its supremacy over a large portion of the Malay Peninsula between the VIIth. and the XIIth. centuries A. D (1).

(1) Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, vol xviii, pt. vi.

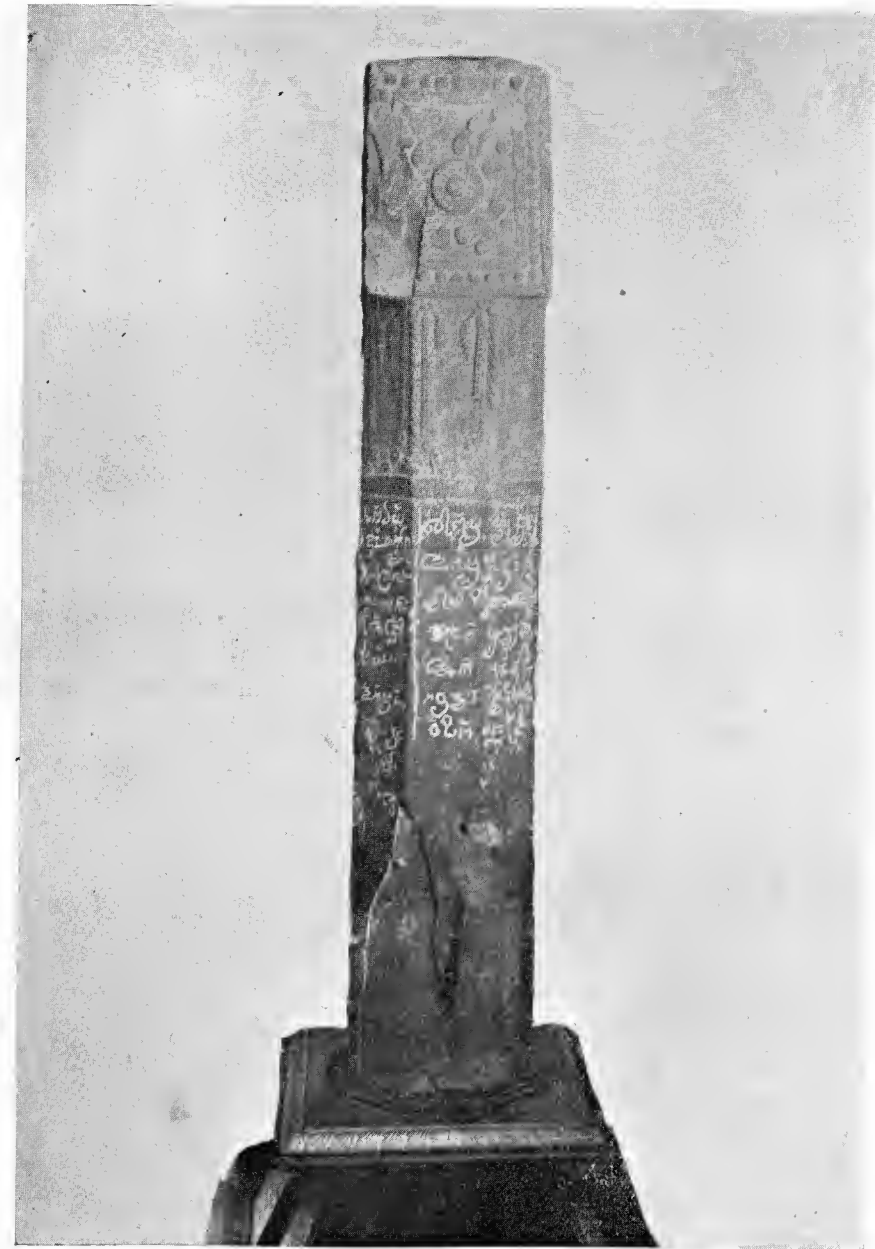
It is a well known fact that, until the middle of the XIIIth. century, Eastern and Central Siam was a province of the Cambodian Empire. Sanskrit and Khmer inscriptions are very numerous in the Eastern provinces, and the Vajirañāṇa National Library possesses a number of them, taken from Lopburi, Phnom Rung, Dan Pakham and Krabin.

The history of the Sukhodaya dynasty which established the first Siamese independent kingdom towards the middle of the XIIIth. century, can be reconstructed almost exclusively with the help of epigraphy⁽¹⁾. All the important inscriptions of the Sukhodaya dynasty are to be seen and studied at the National Library, from the famous stele of Rāma Khamheng, the oldest known writing in Siamese, to the religious inscriptions of his grandson, the pious King Phya Lüthai Dhammarāja.

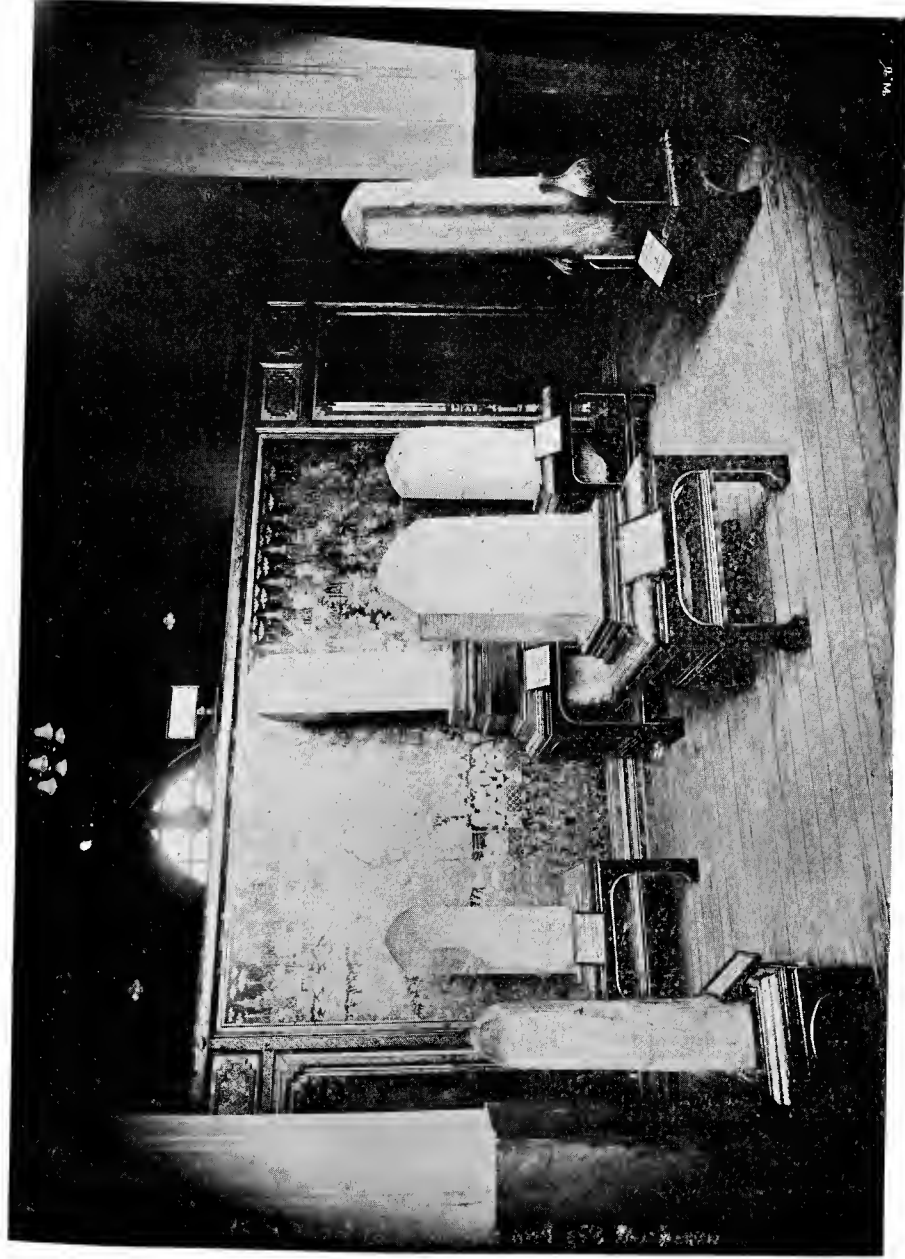
The North-Western province is extremely rich in epigraphic documents from the XVth. century onwards, and a good specimen of this type, taken from Chieng Sen, is kept with the other inscriptions just mentioned.

Besides original stones, the Council of the Vajirañāṇa National Library is making an attempt to collect copies or "squeezes" of all the inscriptions which are still scattered throughout the country. A circular letter sent to the Viceroys and Lords-Lieutenants in 1921, and accompanied by a short pamphlet explaining how to take "squeezes," has met with a ready response on the part of those high officials, and has yielded good results. The collection of the copies of inscriptions kept in the Foreign Department enables the student to read, as clearly as on the original, interesting documents still lying in remote parts of the Kingdom.

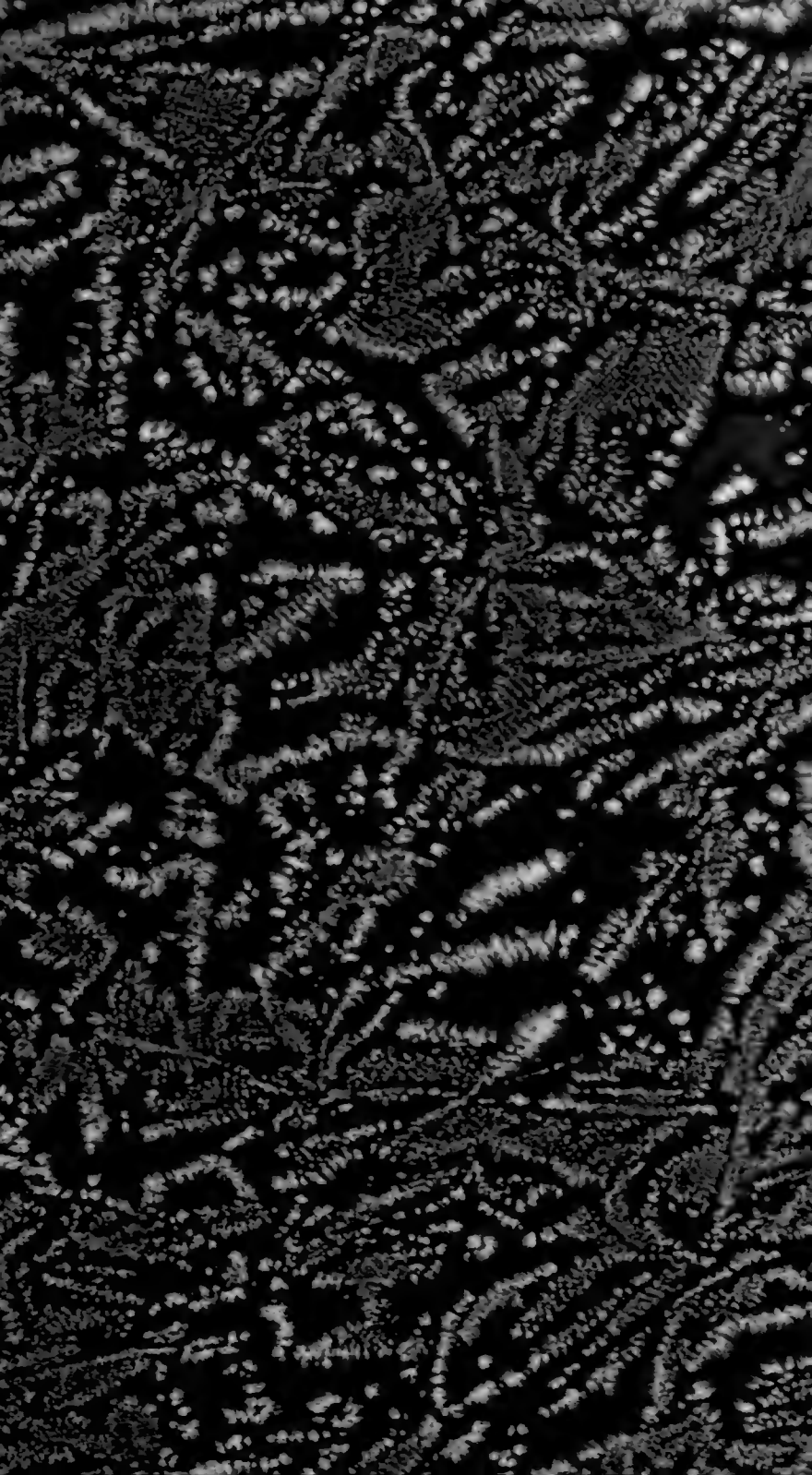
(1) The inscriptions of the Sukhodaya dynasty have been recently published in Siamese and French by the author of this notice, as the first volume of the Corpus of the Inscriptions of Siam.

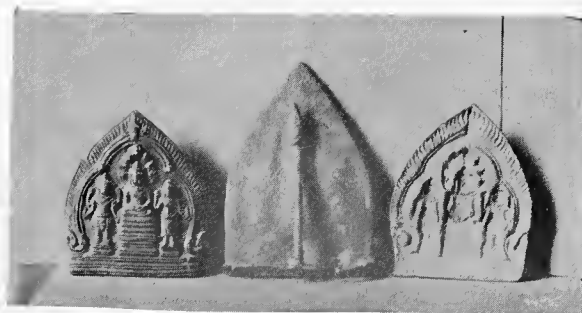


Stone Pillar from Lopburi
bearing a Mon inscription (VIIth-VIIIth Century).



Group of Inscriptions from Sukhodaya.





Buddhist votive Tablets.